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ABSTRACT

The Advisory and Learning Exchange (ALE), located in Washington, D. C., is sometimes classified as a teaching center but also functions as an organization with a helping or facilitating role for individuals, groups, and schools. In pursuing the objectives of encouraging, organizing, connecting, and facilitating learning and growth experiences for those in the Washington community, the Advisory has identified a series of program strategies which include workshops, support and assistance of individual and whole schools, operation and maintenance of a material and information center, and liason and influence with District of Columbia Public Schools and other organizations. The primary strategy for bringing people with common interests and concerns together is the conducting of workshops and seminars which range in topic from introducing new curriculum materials to constructing classroom materials for early childhood education. Formal evaluation has just begun and future plans are focused toward increasing the program to meet the needs of an ever expanding audience. (Author/KSM)

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the sharing of knowledge and concerns:
THE ADVISORY AND LEARNING EXCHANGE

The Advisory and Learning Exchange (ALE), located in Washington, D.C., while sometimes classified as a teaching center, goes far beyond the normal bounds of such a description, for it defines everyone as a teacher. The word "Advisory" relates to the fact that the organization functions in a "helping or facilitating role with individuals, groups, and schools seeking to broaden their perspectives." "Exchange" reflects a commitment to link people who are seeking help with those who can offer it.

Through its variety of activities, the Advisory attempts "to encourage, organize, connect, and facilitate learning and growth experiences for those individuals in the Washington community concerned with education." In pursuing this objective, the Advisory has identified a series of program strategies designed to meet the educational needs of its constituents.

ADVISORY ACTIVITIES

Workshops. The Advisory plans and implements approximately 30 workshops per month, focusing on the interests, requests, and perceived needs of teachers, parents, students, and other concerned citizens. Workshops are conducted at the Advisory headquarters, in public and private schools, and at other locations around the city. The times are flexible and include evenings and weekends.

Support and Assistance of Individuals. The Advisory provides concerned citizens and educators with a vital tool for dealing with specific problems related to education. Through its resource center and qualified personnel, individuals can begin to explore answers to such questions as "What is available in social studies?" or, as asked by a local architect, "What should an open space school look like?" It is estimated that more than 100 individual requests per month are handled by staff members.

Support and Assistance to Whole Schools. In order to avoid the possibility of becoming the exclusive tool of particular parent groups, administrators, or teachers, the Advisory uses the following criteria to help them decide how requests should be handled:

a) Do persons in several roles related to the problem wish to participate in the effort to better understand the problem?
b) Can the school or group desiring assistance contribute on their own; for example, in personnel time or perhaps in assisting partially in payment of personnel?

Some examples of activities conducted for individual schools are:

- A six-week workshop for junior high teachers who were being transferred to a new high school. They had requested help in preparing themselves for teaching at the high school level.
- Advisory aid in planning curriculum revisions for elementary schools, both public and private.
- An eight-week workshops for teachers in bilingual education.

Operation and Maintenance of a Materials and Information Center. In order to add to the success of the above strategies, the Advisory maintains a collection of curriculum materials and information guides in all subject disciplines. In this collection are found only those materials which the Advisory staff has found useful in its work with children and teachers. The materials in this center are available to teachers, parents, and students on a loan basis. In this way, District schools can use curriculum materials to test their appropriateness before purchase. In addition, the Advisory holds several sets of films from "Man: A Course of Study," which many schools cannot afford to purchase.

Liaison and Influence with District of Columbia Public Schools and Other Organizations. In order to provide for the widest range of needs, the Advisory maintains close ties with the D.C. public schools as well as with the major institutions of higher education in the area. Close contact and coordination with the Superintendent for Instruction is emphasized. A concerted effort on the part of the Advisory to cooperate with private organizations such as the D.C. Citizens for Better Public Education in the development of support for educational improvements is one of the organization's prime functions.

HOW DID THE ADVISORY GET STARTED?

Growing out of two summer workshops on open education held in Washington,

D.C., the Advisory and Learning Exchange began formal operations in October 1971. The organization drew its initial audience and personnel from participants in these workshops. Although no financial resources were available at this time, the Advisory stuck to its purpose of bringing together people who "over a period of time [have developed] a common philosophy and commitment to urban education." The first newsletter in that month was mailed out for the Advisory by the D.C. Citizens for Better Public Education.

This initial newsletter represented a call for support and input for program direction from former participants in the workshops. Responses to this call indicated an overwhelming desire among teachers and parents for an extended series of workshops designed to meet a wide variety of needs and interests.

Originally, the Advisory considered using school space for its operations. However, the difficulties in maintaining this space after the school day placed severe limitations on activities, and the decision was made to obtain space in downtown Washington. Teachers have indicated that they appreciate the respite from a school-dominated atmosphere.

Currently, the Advisory is operating as a service-oriented organization within a non-profit foundation, Associates for Renewal in Education (ARE). Mary Lela Sherburne serves as president of ARE. In addition to support from the Ford, New World, Strong, and Meyer Foundations, the Advisory receives support from the D.C. Public Schools in the form of two master teachers who have been assigned to the Advisory to work as staff members.

In spite of the dependence on outside funding, the staff of the Advisory is singularly behind a basic belief: the most valuable resources available are the teachers, students, administrators, and parents who are dedicated to children and to the search for more meaningful ways to intervene in their learning. The Advisory is operated by a staff of fourteen people, some of whom work on a part-time basis. Most of the staff members have been associated with public schools either as elementary teachers or administrators. Several members of the staff volunteer their time.

WHAT DOES THE ADVISORY HAVE TO OFFER?

The primary strategy for bringing people with common interests and concerns together is the conducting of a wide variety of workshops and seminars. Some typical examples of workshops given by the Advisory are:

- "Nearby Places to go for Learning--For Free" -- A guide for using local resources conducted by people familiar with local parks and museums.
- "What Every Parent Should Know But Is Afraid To Ask" -- Directed at parents who are connected with day care programs.
- "Origami" -- The ancient art of Japanese paper folding offered to teachers by a fellow teacher.
- "Man: A Course of Study: Opening Session" -- Designed for teachers who will be using these curriculum materials and conducted by Olive Covington and Cemmy Peterson of the Advisory staff.
- "Leadership: The Leader + the Follower + the Situation" -- For anyone who views himself as a leader or wishes he were.
- "An Eco-Systems Workshop" -- For teachers of upper elementary and junior high level concerned with the teaching of ecology.
- "Workjobs" -- For teachers of early childhood who would like to learn how to construct their own materials.
- "Cuba" -- One workshop in a series on Spanish speaking countries, designed to meet the needs of the large Spanish population residing in the D.C. area.
- "Social Studies Symposium" -- Conducted for teachers interested in social studies from early childhood through high school by Alan Markowitz and Fran Pratt of the Social Science Education Consortium.
- "Pillows--Comfort-Cozy--Classroom???" -- Miriam Ross of the Advisory staff shows students and teachers how to make their own pillows to help them make their classrooms more informal.

These workshop examples are but a small segment of the thirty or more sessions offered each month. However, the appeal to parents, teachers, administrators, and students is clearly illustrated.

The outcome of a large proportion of these workshops is the development of ideas and materials. Samples of materials which are developed remain at the Advisory so that they will be available to others. In addition to contributing their ideas and materials to the Advisory, area teachers conduct many of the workshops. They have realized the value of sharing their experiences, skills, and thoughts.

In addition to using the resources of local teachers, the Advisory has made wide use of other personnel resources in the Washington area as well as educators from other parts of the country. To date, over one hundred outside consultants, including Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard and Lillian Weber of City College of New York, have conducted workshops relating to specific needs and requests. Approximately one-third of these workshop leaders have contributed their time as a gift to the Advisory and Learning Exchange.

The largest proportion of ALE's efforts are concerned with "practical and highly specific efforts focused on improving instruction and learning." Workshops cover every discipline and curriculum area. In the area of social studies, regular monthly workshops are conducted for teachers and parents in "Man: A Course of Study" and "People and Technology." In April, teachers at all grade levels partici-

A math workshop focuses on manipulative materials in the classroom...

Equipment is kept in the library for people to prepare their own materials.

A science workshop participant an experiment to test his hypo

A child joins his mother at a workshop on learning through chance, games, and story telling.

People come together informally at the Advisory to learn from each other.

and moves outside to explore math problems in the environment.

tries
thesis

pated in a two-day workshop conducted by Teacher Associates from the Social Science Education Consortium designed to acquaint participants with new trends and materials in social studies education. Workshops for pre-school teachers are not differentiated by subject matter, since the Advisory believes that "a developmental, holistic child approach should be emphasized here."

While most workshops are conducted by educators, several community people have been invited by the Advisory to respond to specific requests. Richard Rynex, a local parent and proprietor of the Friendly Beasties Pet Shop, gave an extremely popular presentation, "Animals in the Classroom," to elementary teachers and interested students and parents.

In addition to the formal workshops, many individual teachers often request informal gatherings of people with a similar concern to merely swap ideas. Andrea Irby, a local teacher, published a request in the ALE newspaper to meet with fellow teachers interested in "doing something different with social studies." One measure of the workshops' success is that local teacher-training institutions have recognized the utility of ALE's activities in their education programs. Persons attending 30 hours of Advisory workshops can obtain 3 quarter hours of graduate or undergraduate credit from Federal City College. In addition, credit can be received for participating in the series of workshops related to "Man: A Course of Study." Other local colleges and universities are now participating in this credit program.

CAN OTHER DISTRICTS USE AN ADVISORY?

"In most large cities and a good many smaller ones...the public schools are in disarray, torn apart by conflicts over integration, desegregation, decentralization, and community control....The public school never has done much of a job of educating youngsters from the lower class or from immigrant homes....In the end, we come back to the teacher!"

Charles Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom*. New York: Random House, 1970.

"It should be obvious that even with schools of equal quality a poor child can seldom catch up with a rich one. Even if they attend equal schools and begin at the same age, poor children lack most of the educational opportunities which are casually available to the middle-class child."

Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

"Teachers talk too much!"

John Holt, *The Underachieving School*. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1969.

The above quotes point out, to a very limited degree, the challenge that we, as educators, face in providing opportunities for our students to gain a quality education. While all schools face the same challenge--quality education for all students--urban school systems are now under a constant barrage from writers like Silberman, Illich, and Holt. It is in these schools that socioeconomic background, diversity of abilities, and past failures are most recognizable. If we, as teachers or parents in urban settings, are to accept the views of our critics at face value, then we might just as well "pack up and close down" as one teacher in Washington, D.C., put it. However, if we intend to face the challenge and turn the tide of popular opinion, service centers for teachers--both professional and non-professional--similar to the Advisory and Learning Exchange can be an important help.

While the notion of a teaching center organized along the lines of the Advisory and Learning Exchange should be extremely attractive to all school districts regardless of their geographical, cultural, or socioeconomic position, it becomes all the more crucial for districts which are beset by typical urban educational problems. The Advisory, through the utilization of a vast pool of community resources and the mixing of teachers, parents, students, and interested community residents, has provided an example for other large school systems. While staff on the Advisory readily admit that the problems of the Washington schools will not be solved by their organization, they are confident that participants in their programs are no longer suffering from the impersonal atmosphere usually associated with people involved in large urban school systems. Unlike Silberman's description, parents, students, and professional educators associated with ALE are beginning to work in an aura of cooperation and mutual exchange and understanding rather than confrontation.

Although the Advisory is funded by outside sources, it is the strong hope of the staff that a similar program can be adapted to other district situations without heavy reliance on outside funding. The notion of a teaching center as a resource for teachers is a rapidly expanding one. The preponderance of local resources are just beginning to be tapped by school districts. Inservice training, while usually confined to the needs of teachers in individual schools, is becoming regarded as an effective means of improving classroom instruction. *Bringing people together from several schools and the community to share mutual concerns and to learn from each other is a vital tool in dispelling teacher frustration.*

IS IT WORKING?

Although the original mailing list of the Advisory and Learning Exchange consisted of 125 participants from past summer workshops, it is now estimated that approximately 7,000 teachers, pupils, parents, and community residents were served by the Advisory in its second year, 1972-73. The average attendance at workshops during this period was 20 participants.

As examples of the value of the program to educators, staff members point to such experiences as:

- Catholic University requested the ALE to provide instructors for three courses being offered in Early Childhood Education.
- The Advisory conducted a course in social studies for MAT interns at Howard University.
- A teacher who attended a previous "Man: A Course of Study" workshop is now training another teacher across town.

While staff members point to the above incidents as well as the increased enthusiasm on the part of people involved in the program as a measure of success, a formal evaluation design for the program activities and the effectiveness of the Advisory has been developed by Dr. Essin Kaya of Hofstra University. Data gathering has been conducted for the past several months and interpretation of that data is in progress.

FUTURE PLANS

The Advisory is anxious to maintain their present degree of audience expansion. Each month the workshop schedule is disseminated through the newsletter.

The focus of past workshops, seminars, and other Advisory activities has always been influenced by members of the community. "Prior to this year, the heavy emphasis has always been on elementary school education," related Cenny Peterson, staff member in charge of social studies. "We are now beginning to notice the development of new interests which will greatly influence our future programs." Pre-school teachers, aides, day-care workers, and parents are requesting workshops and experiences related to the needs of very young children. At the same time, "the presence of students from junior high and senior high schools in tutoring workshops, requests from personnel in secondary education, and the increasing need for improving education at this level" is being heard. The added burdens placed on the Advisory in attempting to fill these needs will be more than offset by the fact that this pressure will bring the organization closer to its original objective of "improving education overall in Washington, D.C., and building support for meaningful educational programs in the community."

The Advisory's work is greatly enhanced by a system of interchange with similar service-oriented organizations in other cities. In addition to working with the Social Science Education Consortium, contact has been made with organizations such as the Center for Open Education, New York City; Teacher Center, New Haven, Connecticut; and the Institute for Teacher Education, Bogota, Columbia.

For more information

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ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 068 446 - A Workshop Kit for Stimulating Involvement in the Development of Teacher Education Centers. MF - $.65, HC - $3.29. A workshop kit designed to stimulate school personnel to work together to plan a teacher education center appropriate to a particular locale.

ED 063 569 - Responsiveness in Urban Schools: A Study of School System Adaptation to Parental Preferences in an Urban Environment. MF - $.65, HC - $13.16. The study explores the relationship between parents' educational preferences and actual school programs. Educators' lack of understanding of parental preferences is emphasized.

ED 058 974 - Rationale for Content and Method of the Teacher and Teacher-Aide Training Program. MF - $.65, HC - $3.29. This document gives the rationale for the content and method of five teacher and teacher-aide training workshops. A list of 14 training needs identified by participants is included.

ED 058 937 - Parent/Teacher Relations in Primary Schools." Available from Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 49 High Holborn, London WC1, England. This book contains examples of good practices in parent/teacher relations from schools in all parts of England.

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